

Jackson council approves ban on dormitories

Mike Davis, @byMikeDavis

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(Photo: David Gard)

JACKSON — The standing-room-only crowd of more than 200 erupted in cheers as the township council voted unanimously to ban the construction of dormitories in town.

During the public debate about the law, the five-member panel had been surprisingly mum on the issue. But three of the four council members present — Councilman Rob Nixon was absent due to a scheduling conflict — offered their vocal support before voting.

"The reality is this ordinance is not against any race or religion and only a bigoted person would think as much," Councilman Barry Calogero said. "It's an ordinance that would preserve our current suburban culture,

reduce suburban sprawl and limit unwanted overdevelopment in our township."

MORE: [Jackson council members silent on potential dorm ban \(/story/news/local/communitychange/2017/03/13/jackson-dormitories-ordinance-lakewood-orthodox/99006428/\)](#)

Like Calogero, supporters have propped up the ordinance changes — which would also limit school construction — as a way to preserve quality of life. But opponents said the [new laws were rooted in anti-Semitism \(/story/news/local/communitychange/2017/03/01/jackson-dormitories-ordinance-lakewood/98525976/\)](#).

"I moved here from Lakewood. I don't like Lakewood. I don't like what happened to Lakewood," said Pitney Lane resident Isaac Tawil. "We would like to support you, but there's going to have to be a dialogue. You're going to have to communicate with us."

Dormitories are closely linked to the religious schools of the area's growing Jewish Orthodox community: Even those who spoke in favor of the dormitory ban referenced the neighboring town of Lakewood, where that growing community has led to [traffic and a development boom \(/story/news/local/jackson-lakewood/2015/08/08/lakewood-growth-boom-changing-ocean-county/31318143/\)](#).

"Lakewood is running out of room, so they're expanding," said Lawrence Street resident Michael Jordan. "Whether we like that or not, the reason they're jumping to every town is because there's no more room. If you let this happen here — if you let the dorms come in — the roads are going to get worse than they've ever been."

There currently aren't any yeshivas in Jackson and the only "dorms" in town are housing units operated by Six Flags Great Adventure for its seasonal employees.

Avi Schnall, state director for Jewish advocacy group Agudath Israel, said last week that he wasn't aware of any dormitory, yeshiva or school in Jackson.

But at Thursday's council meeting, he questioned why, if the concern was development, the only ordinance to address it was targeting dormitories.

"Why are we not addressing that issue head on," Schnall asked.

MORE: [Is Jackson's dormitory ordinance anti-Semitic? \(/story/news/local/communitychange/2017/03/01/jackson-dormitories-ordinance-lakewood/98525976/\)](#)

But during public meetings, members of the township's Orthodox Jewish community have cited the rural community and quiet life as a reason to leave Lakewood. All the ordinance change does is protect that, supporters said.

"We don't need any more development in this town," said North Cooksbridge Road resident Polly Sheehan. "We're good the way we are. I don't care what religion anybody is — we're good. We don't need any more development."

The pair of laws adopted by the Jackson council on Thursday focuses solely on legal construction. Makeshift dormitories or schools — like the one that [burned down in Lakewood \(/story/news/investigations/watchdog/government/2016/07/14/dorm-fire-lakewood-fine/87040886/\)](#) last year — are already illegal under housing codes.

Under the ordinance:

Jackson council votes to ban dormitories amid anti-Semitism complaints

- Dormitories — defined as buildings "designed or converted to contain living quarters" used by schools, colleges or religious groups — would be unilaterally banned throughout the town.
- All school construction — both public and private — would be restricted to three relatively small zones: Neighborhood Commercial; Limited Commercial; and Planned Mixed Unit Residential Development.

Changing culture

But even the faint suggestion of such construction has rekindled nearly three years of tension over community growth, development, and changing culture.

Posted by The Asbury Park Press
10,290 Views

Over the last two years, Kosher grocery stores and Hebrew signs have become increasingly commonplace in Jackson, where Orthodox Jewish families are turning to avoid the congestion of Lakewood, whose population has skyrocketed beyond an estimated 99,000 residents (</story/news/local/jackson-lakewood/2015/08/08/lakewood-growth-boom-changing-ocean-county/31318143/>).

There have been a series of public flare-ups among longtime Jackson residents, usually in the form of angry social media posts or outbursts at council meetings:

- **June 2014:** The zoning board rejected plans for an all-girls' Orthodox high school (</story/news/local/jackson-lakewood/lakewood/2014/06/18/jackson-nixes-orthodox-school/10825257/>). A state judge upheld the rejection last year.
- **August 2015:** The council strengthened its "no-knock" ordinance (</story/news/local/jackson-lakewood/jackson/2015/08/11/jackson-lakewood-solicitation-ordinance/31492173/>) after residents complained of pushy real estate solicitors — identified as Orthodox Jews — who wouldn't take no for an answer.
- **May 2016:** Township officials demanded the police department instruct the Lakewood Civilian Safety Watch — a volunteer neighborhood patrol — to stay out of Jackson (</story/news/local/communitychange/2016/05/11/jackson-lakewood-civilian-safety-watch/84178906/>). When Police Chief Matthew Kunz demurred, it led to a public spat with Councilman Rob Nixon.
- **August 2016:** The township filed a blockbusting complaint with the state and federal Justice Departments (</story/news/local/communitychange/2016/08/26/jackson-lakewood-orthodox-blockbusting/89252518/>) after video of a rabbi calling on Orthodox Jews to be "shtickle pioneers" and settle in Jackson went viral within the community.

But on Thursday, the mere mention of anti-Semitic comments was met with boos from the crowd.

"Read all the social media and tell me there's no anti-Semitism," Tawil said.

"You just said we weren't anti-Semitic," replied another resident from his seat.

"I didn't say you. I said social media," Tawil retorted.



Isaac Tawil speaks. The Jackson township council voted on its controversial dormitory ordinance. The last meeting featured many members of the Orthodox Jewish community, as well as many "Jackson Strong" people who swear they're not anti-Semites. Jackson, New Jersey. Thursday, March, 16, 2017. David Gard /Correspondent (Photo: David Gard)

JACKSON GROWS UP: Orthodox, senior communities on the rise (/story/news/local/jackson-lakewood/jackson/2015/08/31/jackson-population-orthodox-seniors/32400945/)

See you in court?

The new dormitory ordinance could be destined for a legal challenge, according to attorneys who have represented yeshivas in the past.

Attorney Glenda Rath described the ordinances last month as "nothing more than veiled discrimination targeting a specific religious group."

And in a letter to the Asbury Park Press (</story/opinion/readers/2017/02/28/letter-proposed-dorms-ban-will-face-court-test/98520074/>), attorney Robert Greene wrote that the township "should consider itself placed on notice that its heavy-handed attempt to target a particular population could very well be challenged in an appropriate venue.

Both Rath and Greene are with the firm Storzer & Associates, which represented Gedola Na'os Yaakov, a group [looking to build a yeshiva and dormitory in Ocean Township \(/story/news/local/communitychange/2016/08/26/ocean-yeshiva-dorm-logan-road-court/89412834/\)](/story/news/local/communitychange/2016/08/26/ocean-yeshiva-dorm-logan-road-court/89412834/).

MORE: Threats rattle Jewish centers (/story/news/crime/jersey-mayhem/2017/03/17/threats-against-religious-facilities-on-the-rise/98644812/)

After rejection on the local and state level, a federal judge ruled that the township violated the [Religious Land Use And Institutionalized Persons Act \(https://www.justice.gov/crt/religious-land-use-and-institutionalized-persons-act\)](https://www.justice.gov/crt/religious-land-use-and-institutionalized-persons-act), which prohibits placing burdensome land use regulations on religious groups.

"In this day and age of building walls against other people and cultures, fear and panic should not supplant our important constitutional values," Greene wrote.

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John Thomas Dilberger

Okay, Now for step #2. They lost locally. Now they'll go find a corrupt federal judge and he'll/she'll rule in favor of the Orthodox Jewish group (the judge has already been bought and paid for). This is the way they do things.

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David Delucia ·

Brookdale Community College

if that happens. the people of Jackson should protest the judge and not let him or her have any peace .and i don't mean just a couple of days i mean a long haul protest and make his life miserable . We citizens have to make judges accountable in this state . They seem to think they are the elected law makers which they are not . That has to stop

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Mark Rosenwald

David Delucia Unfortunately the only recourse you have is to go to the Appellate Court and then the Federal District and then to the Supreme Court. The Hasidim have enourmous resources even as many of them are on welfare.

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Christy Barber

Can you imagine if any other religion, special interest group, race, etc was as discriminating as this group? Can you imagine if any of these groups purchased land in neighborhoods until it was "cohesive," or built new complexes only for a certain religion? Can you imagine if any of these groups used public funds for segregated busing and schools that do not follow state mandated curriculum, and schools that are not open to anyone outside that religion? Can you imagine any other group having its own mini judicial system that often protects criminals and instead uses rabbinical justice? If ANY other group formed neighborhoods based on certain criteria "This neighborhood is only for (Catholics, Blacks, Muslims,etc)" or blockbusted until there was a majority in a pre-existing neighborhood, there would be public outcry.

And so because a town doesn't want to deal with the same infrastructure issues as Lakewood, now they are anti-Semitic? Really? How can nobody in the upper echelons of government not see what is going on here? This will soon be a national problem and not just a regional one.

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David Delucia ·

Brookdale Community College

they use the anti semitic card which is their default position all the time . until Jackson allows an other religious group to do what they wanted too do they have no leg to stand on . i think from here on out towns are going to have to come up with a formula as to how much taxed exempt property is allowed in a given town . as seen with Lakewood they went over the limit what ever that is ..

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Mark Rosenwald

David Delucia I don't know if it is legal to do so and if anything would have to part of the Master Plan. You just can't "Spot Zone."....the courts will throw it out

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David Delucia ·

Brookdale Community College

Mark Rosenwald i guess so but at the same time any town can't have a high percentage of tax exempt properties . as we can see with Lakewood . as mentioned above maybe a formula of some sort and also being everyone is on the diversity kick these days, not any one group wont be able use up the supposed allotment of tax exempt space .that would have to be portioned out; maybe . its situations like this and the system being abused forces different measures .if they did things so called normally we wouldn't be discussing any of this right .

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Christina Quatrano

What the Jews are doing is wanting people who have lived for decades in Jackson to sell their beloved homes, leave behind the lives they have built in Jackson, so they can ship more of their people into Ocean County. There is a major reason why Trump was elected. Because American citizens are sick and tired of being pushed out of their homes, their jobs; all for people to come here to take away the benefits-that American citizens fought so hard to have. We were never a socialist country, but I witness too many times the Hasidic's pulling out their cards from the gov't for free stuff. And now they want to take our very town from us. A message to the Hasidic-the Old Testament states to not covet anything of your neighbors-including their homes.

Exodus 20:17

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

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Susan C Montemorano ·

Ramapo, New York

Please don't be so naive. First of all, it's not the Jews! You are painting a lot of very nice and hard-working people with a terrible brush.

All of your problems only stem from the Ultra-Religious! The Hasidics and Ultra-Orthodox!
And then it's mostly the rabbis and the rich developers who are to blame! The followers are sheeple who are cut off from the modern world and don't know much about anything!
If you really want to see what's going on just Google Monsey, NY, Kiryas Joel, NY and Bloomingburg, NY.
There is a population explosion in Brooklyn, and they are coming to a town near you.
And no, they won't go away - they will double their numbers in about 10 years. So figure out who will be the majority soon in Jackson.
Oh, and they do know how to pay off the politicians, don't they?

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Marc Covitz ·

Medical Science Liaison at AbbVie

Toms River is facing a similar issue.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · Mar 19, 2017 10:35pm



David Delucia ·

Brookdale Community College

it would be interesting in Lakewood if the orthodox community bought every gentile home and property. i am trying to figure out how it would play out . would they all tax exempt them selves ? and if so how would they go about paying for their services . one thing for sure the public school would be gone but aside from that how would they handle the maintenance of the town ? or would they always need a gentile portion of the town so as to be taxed to support the services even the tax exempt properties .

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Susan C Montemorano ·

Ramapo, New York

No problem, then the state will step in and pay!

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Steve Megna ·

Works at Retired

Umm, look at New Square NY and Kiryas Joel NY for your answer.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · Mar 18, 2017 9:13am



Dana Higgins ·

Foreman/Project Manager at Pat Maggio & Son Electric, Inc.

If u have negative things to say about jahovahs witnesses knocking on your door does that make u anti-christian?... of course not... if hypothetically someone has issue with actions of individuals of the orthodox sect of judaism why would that automatically fall under umbrella of anti-semitism???

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Mark Rosenwald

because it's very easy to play that card...they have learned

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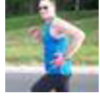


Marc Covitz

Medical Science Liaison at AbbVie

It's nice to see Jackson support the ban on dormitories and state they want to limit suburban sprawl. However, where were they when they allowed Mitch Leigh's Jackson 21 which is the epitomy of sprawl? Where were they when they allowed Great Adventure to clear cut about 70 acres of Pine Barrens forest for a solar farm when they have 100 acres of blacktop parking lots that can easily support carport solar panels?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · Mar 19, 2017 10:44pm



Marc Covitz

Medical Science Liaison at AbbVie

South Brunswick opposed a similar issue (Riva Avenue off of Rte 130) a couple of years ago. The Orthodox community wanted to turn a private home into a yeshiva and residence. It was voted down and no law suit was filed.

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Peter Siano Sr.

Asbury Park High School

Well,just as day follows nite,you will lose this case,but your show of feeling for the towns hostility to this dormitory will not be forgotten,except for the cost of litigation,in a hopeless endeavor.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · Mar 17, 2017 8:18am



Jack Shain

Utica, New York

Jus ta quick comment from the other side. I am an orthodox jewish guy that moved to Jackson a few months ago. I am a hard working tax paying citizen as is my wife. We work hard to support our 2 boys and moved to Jackson to escape the traffic and congestion of Lakewood. We love the serene and beatiful neighborhood and we are not looking to change anything. Most of my friends that have moved out here came with the same intentions and we were welcomed quite warmly by the neighbors.

We are also just as against mass building and developing as everyone in Jackson. We could have moved within Lakewood if we wanted that. Lakewood living is much more convenient for us as our families, synagogues and schools etc are there.

The only issue with the ordinance is why cant schools and or dorms be built on a 10 acre campus in a remote commercial area? We are all for rules but they must be sensible. It is unfortunate that none of the board members were willing to come to a meeting with the community leaders to discuss the issues. Just to outright ban all dorms etc will only lead to courtcases as another mentioned it may

reach the supreme court. I would hate for mine and your's tax dollars to go to such costly lawsuits. A ban of such sort is un-precedented in any State in the US and I cant see it being upheld.

Again to re-iterate I am all for limited building and development and zoning laws but in a democracy there should be a conversation.

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Michelle Jones

Good job Jackson! Keep fighting! Other towns need to take notice and take action!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · Mar 17, 2017 8:13am



Susan C Montemorano ·

Ramapo, New York

They haven't won yet!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · Mar 17, 2017 4:24pm



Janice Del Negro Jensicke

If you havent read this, you should.

<http://www.shorenewsnetwork.com/.../rabbi-brooklyn-jews.../>

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David Delucia ·

Brookdale Community College

thats scary like i said in one of my post we have to use their tactics . it mentions they vote in blocks .they talked about using NJ mt laurel mandates to get the low income Jews to move out of brooklyn. everyone should read this who lives in Jackson and other areas . they want to create a loop around Lakewood . that means brick ,Howell , toms river . gentile people better learn their tactics

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · Mar 17, 2017 7:59pm



David Delucia ·

Brookdale Community College

your right everyon in the towns around lakewood need to read it . maybe get copies printed of the article and put them in everyons mailbox .

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · Mar 19, 2017 8:41am



Steven Yahr ·

South Plainfield High School

it is this very reason why ther is so much dissention ,because instead of becoming part of the community which no one would ever have a problem with it becomes a case where a group pushes out those who are not part of their religious sect , This country is a melting pot of people from all over

the world and of all different faiths who learned to live together, while throughout history of this nation there has been confrontation between various nationalities, in the end we can become a better nation where we all learn to live amongst each other without prejudice, however that cannot happen if groups are determined to stay isolated and shun all those who are different from themselves. It is sad that in today's world we still see such archaic attitudes flourish that only create so many of the problems in today's society

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